

Hospital Ship Rescues GIs With Inches to Spare

By Tom Stone

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INCHON, Korea, Dec. 28.—The United States hospital ship Repose is one of the unsung heroes of the Korean war:

The sleek, 15,000-ton vessel inched 30 miles through a dangerously shallow channel, took aboard more than 750 wounded U. N. troops and carried them out safely before they could be trapped by a surprise Chinese offensive.

The gigantic rescue operation was conducted so smoothly and swiftly it went virtually unnoticed.

The glimmering white ship with big red crosses painted on her sides is safely back at anchor off Inchon in the Yellow Sea off the west coast of Korea.

All but a handful of her patients have been treated for battle wounds and returned to their outfitts or returned to Japan for recuperation.

Capt. C. H. Perdue, commanding officer of the Repose, said the big rescue operation occurred between November 28-30.

Ordered to Chinnampo.

"Several days before then," he said, "we were off Inchon when

we got orders to proceed up to Chinnampo. At that time our ground forces were on the offensive. The mission of the Repose was to provide hospital facilities for our troops in that sector."

He said there were very few wounded.

"But while we were anchored off Chinnampo, the Chinese north of Pyongyang, about 25 or 30 miles northeast of us, started their big offensive.

"In a short time wounded began pouring aboard the ship. We worked around the clock for two and a half days. Our litter hoists and boatswains' chairs were lifting wounded aboard without a bobble. We didn't pull out until the ship's wards were filled to the brim."

He said some United Nations vessels, including American and Australian warships, remained to shell the enemy and bring out troops and equipment. Two United States ships were the destroyer escorts Foss and Forest Royal.

Thirty Navy nurses attached to the Repose worked around the clock caring for the wounded.

Lt. (j. g.) Madge Atkins of Richmond and Lt. (j. g.) Eileen Farrell of Boston, said, "It was hard work and long hours, but we didn't mind a bit. We are here to help take care of the injured."

The most perilous part of the job, said Capt. Perdue, was the task of steering the ship along the narrow winding channel without running aground.

"We couldn't use the main channel because it was heavily mined. The channel we used was only 26 feet deep in places at high tide. The Repose draws 25 feet 6 inches. At times our fathometer reading was about the same as the draw. We didn't have much water under our keel."

As far as he knew his ship was the largest ever to get through the channel.

Helicopter Used as Guide.

Capt. Perdue said a helicopter hovered just above the water in front of the ship looking for mines and helping guide it.

Capt. E. B. Coyl of Takoma Park, Md., senior medical officer aboard, said that at the height of the Chinnampo operation more than 1,300 persons were aboard the hospital ship.

"It was one big problem to feed that many people. But we did. The laundry worked 24 hours a day to help maintain our high standards of cleanliness."

Capt. Coyl is a native Washingtonian and married a Washington girl, Miss Eleanor Hanna, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James G. Hanna, 218 Park avenue, Takoma Park, Md., 25 years ago. They have two children, a daughter, Betty May, 20, and Edwin, Jr., 14. Mrs. Coyl and the children are now living in Philadelphia.

Capt. Coyl's sister, Mrs. Donald Brenneman, and brother, Walter Coyl, live at 6517 Westmoreland avenue, Takoma Park, Md.

Capt. Coyl assisted in fitting out the Repose at San Francisco in August, taking it out of "mothballs." The vessel left immediately for Korea.

Born in Washington July 31, 1904, Capt. Coyl attended the Washington Missionary College, operated by the Seventh-day Adventists at Takoma Park, and graduated from the College of Medical Evangelists, Loma Linda, Calif., in 1931.